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OF HANCOCK COUNTY

Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi

September 2012

COMING EVENTS AT LOBRANO HOUSE

The monthly luncheon meeting will be held on Thursday, September 20, 2012, at noon at the Kate Lobrano House. Guest speaker for the program will be Sandra Montcrief who will discuss her forthcoming book *The Phantom Barber of Pascagoula*. **Reservations are required** and may be made by calling 467-4090. Please call **by noon on Wednesday, September 19**, to make your reservation, to help us plan seating which is limited to forty-eight people, and to apprise us of the number for whom to prepare. The price of the lunch is \$10.00.

ANNUAL CEMETERY TOUR

October looms, so it's time to begin final plans for the Hancock County Historical Society Nineteenth Annual Cemetery Tour. It will be held on Halloween night, Wednesday, **October 31, 2011**, at Cedar Rest Cemetery on Second Street. We will need volunteers to help prepare the cemetery for the tour (mark the path, etc.), to portray citizens buried there, to act as guides, and to serve at the Lobrano House. We also seek donations of cookies, candy, cupcakes, etc. To volunteer, please call the Society at 467-4090.



This drawing comes from the 1874 ed. of the *Life and Bloody Career of the Executed Criminal James Copeland* by J.R.S. Pitts and depicts the execution of James Copeland in Augusta (Perry County), MS.

The James Copeland Gang

By
Jackie Allain

Many people express the opinion that crime is more prevalent now than ever before in the history of Hancock County. At first glance this might appear to be true, but investigation shows that conditions are different. When one examines the available records of crime more than a century

ago and makes a comparison with today's records, it will be found that, based on a percentage of population, crime was more prevalent then than now, although it is bad enough at the present time.

Not only was it necessary for pioneer settlers of the past to fight Indians to protect their families and their property, but they also had to deal with gangs of white outlaws. One would hope that it would be difficult for a band of outlaws similar to the Copeland Clan to exist in Hancock County today because mod-

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"TO PRESERVE THE GENERAL AND ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY OF HANCOCK COUNTY AND TO PRESERVE THE KATE LOBRANO HOUSE AND COLLECTIONS THEREIN; TO RESEARCH AND INTERPRET LIFE IN HANCOCK COUNTY; AND TO ENCOURAGE AN APPRECIATION OF AND INTEREST IN HISTORICAL PRESERVATION."

ern methods of coping with criminals would quickly suppress them.

In the annals of American outlaws, James Copeland, considered to be among the most villainous and most notorious in his own day, has, to some degree, been overlooked today. Though his outlaw reputation persists regionally, his deeds have been cast into shadows by the prominence of other more notable American outlaws such as the James Brothers, Billy the Kid, and others.

James Copeland and his criminal deeds and murderous intentions made his name a household word in the 1830's and 1840's from Mobile Bay to Lake Pontchartrain. He robbed, burned, and killed in a path of destruction that extended from Mobile to San Antonio.

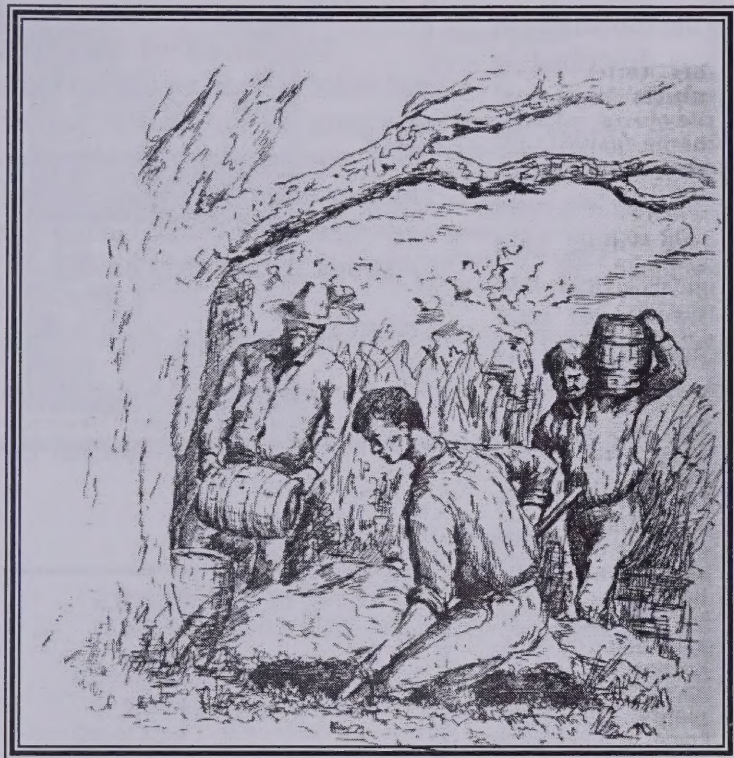
One has to wonder how and why the regionally known Copeland has been overlooked for so long. How could such an unconscionable figure as Copeland languish in the national historical shadows when names of lesser bad guys who roamed the West are common household names? Had a figure of this sort walked the streets of Tombstone or Dodge City, how many books, films, and TV shows would have perpetuated his name and magnified his deeds?

The details of Copeland's life make one wonder how a single human being could have led a life filled with as much crime and violence as Copeland confessed. His criminal career began when he was twelve with the theft of a pocket knife from a neighbor who was

in the garden picking greens. His crimes escalated to include arson, larceny, murder, and mutilation. A rumor persists that \$30,000 in stolen gold was buried by the Copeland gang in south Mississippi.

It is believed that two successful discoveries of Copeland gold have been recovered. One cache was unearthed in a field near Meridian, MS, in 1884 and another in 1937 on the banks of Red Creek. In the latter, timber cutters uncovered a pot of gold coins. Over time there have been countless unsuccessful attempts to find Copeland Clan gold, though many fortune seekers still search for the elusive treasure in suspected sites. Among the sites that have piqued the interest of Coast residents are the repeated rumors of caches on the banks of the Wolf River north of Pass Christian and the banks of the East Pearl River in Hancock County. Other land sites include one near White Harbor near Pass Christian and one near the present site of Edgewater Mall in Biloxi. But the most persistent local rumors have been of the barrels of the \$30,000 in gold coins that Copeland "confessed" to have buried in the Catahoula Swamp in Hancock County.

Unquestionably members of the Copeland Clan stole and buried enormous quantities of gold. In those days, gold and silver were the common medium of exchange. Copeland plundered during the era of stagecoaches and horseback travel when most people distrusted banks. Travelers carried their money on their person or in



This drawing depicts the burying of gold stolen by the Copeland Gang—perhaps somewhere in Hancock County.

bags in their luggage. Many were robbed and murdered by Copeland's clan. It was not unusual for roadside taverns to shelter guests with combined assets of up to one million dollars. With few lawman around, Copeland and his gang flourished. Exactly how much gold and silver the clan buried is a mystery and probably will never be known.

Over 150 years after Copeland's death, treasure hunters still speculate on the locations of the clan's unclaimed fortune. Every year, fresh holes appear along river banks and in fields where hand-me-down stories and rumors pinpoint sites where the lost gold may be buried.

And so the treasure stories continue as does the Copeland mystique. He was only thirty-four years old when he paid the ultimate debt to society in 1857. He was tried and

hanged in Augusta, MS, in Perry County. Though history books have largely ignored the outlaw's impact on the frontier South, many locals have not. When Mississippi writers were hired for Depression era Works Progress Administration histories, few failed to mention the Copeland clan and its crime sprees.

One of the most frequently repeated Copeland legend relates to the inability of people to keep a published copy of James Copeland's memoirs. Tradition has it that clan members passed from generation to generation an oath to find and destroy all copies, and there have been persistent rumors of mass book burnings. The 1858 edition of the *Life and Confessions of the Noted Outlaw James Copeland* blemished many respectable names when Copeland listed, supposedly without exception, the secret members of

the clan. No copies are known to exist of that first edition, and the second editions printed in 1874 did the same disappearing act. Again, there were rumors of wholesale thefts of the book by clansmen's descendants.

A third edition of the book reprinted in 1909 still names names, but reportedly not as many as the first editions. Although only a few 1909 copies are known to exist, hidden away in library vaults for safety, hundreds of the 1980 reprints are in circulation. In the end, the Copeland Clan was as unsuccessful in hiding its history as treasure hunters have been in finding the clan's gold.

SOURCE:

"James Copeland." Hancock County Historical Society Vertical File.

ANOTHER OUTLAW: PIERRE REMAUX

By
Eddie Coleman

Pierre Remaux was not the man's birth name, and in fact two spellings of his assumed name have been found: Remaux and Rameau. His original surname was McCullough. Although he was born in Scotland into a prosperous family, this son of a Presbyterian minister emigrated to the United States. Well-educated, fearless, and ambitious, McCullough moved to New Orleans and lived in one of its best houses under the assumed name of Colonel Loring. He claimed to be a mine owner

and operator from Mexico.

However, McCullough's dreams of becoming rich and powerful were not fulfilled by his supposed mine operations. These aspirations were reached through his acts of piracy in the Gulf of Mexico. Headquartered in Gainesville, he and his felonious horde did not limit their exploits just to piracy in the Gulf. As Robert G. Scharff states in *Louisiana's Loss, Mississippi's Gain*, "He had fast ships for piracy at sea and desperate men with fast horses for robbery on land." Having absolutely no loyalty to any nation, the lawbreakers robbed ships of all nationalities in the Gulf waters. After raiding a ship, the villains slipped into the "no man's land" of the marshes and bayous along the Gulf and the Pearl River. Because of their knowledge of the pitfalls of these waters, the gang members were able to escape anyone who dared follow them into these treacherous byways. To insure their escape, they placed obstructions in the river channels and had guards along the river to protect them.

Even though Remaux was known as the "King of Honey Island," he and his men had other hideouts besides that isle. They had property on the Mississippi side of the Pearl including "caves dug into a bluff at the old Baldwin place south of Pearlinton." Supposedly, he also had warehouses in secluded places along the Pearl in which to store his ill-gotten gains.

Remaux was not content to limit his robberies to any one place, and no one was immune to his piracy. Scharff relates one such incident:

"One of [the robberies] at Bay St. Louis was described in Maurice Thompson's historical novel [*The King of Honey Island*]. Through his informers, Remaux had learned that a man named Vernon, who lived in a spacious house on the beach, had a considerable amount of gold and gems of great value in his possession. Remaux took three of his men and went to Bay St. Louis. They arrived there just after dark and robbed the man....Because the man protested so violently during the robbery, Remaux tied him to a chair and set the house on fire. The man's slaves, who had hidden in terror while the robbery was in progress, rushed in after the robbers left, [sic] and rescued their owner from being

burned alive."

The arrival of some law and order to the area did not bring this gang to any sort of justice. They continued to live in their "hidden lairs on Honey Island, and they frequented Gainesville and other river communities."

SOURCE:

Scharff, Robert G. *Louisiana's Loss, Mississippi's Gain*. Lawrenceville, VA: Brunswick Pub. Co., 1999.

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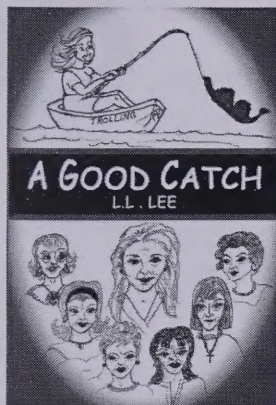
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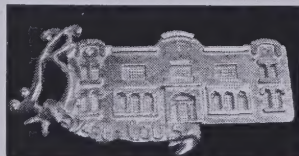
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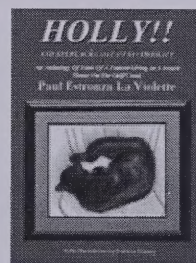
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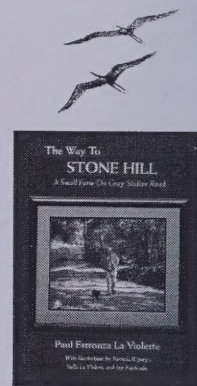
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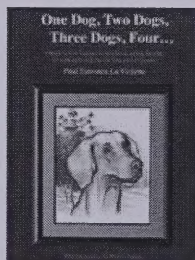
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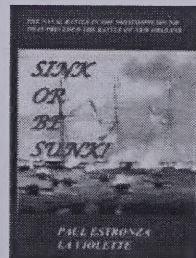
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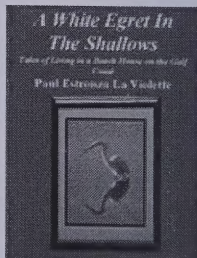
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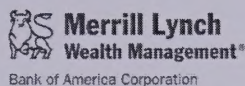


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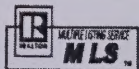
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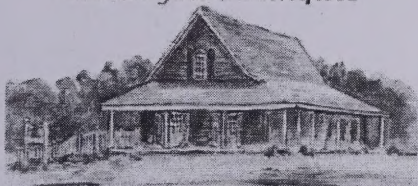
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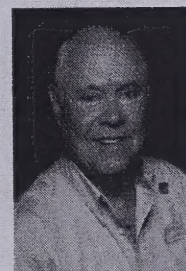
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